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ABSTRACT

Career maturity denotes degree of readiness to make realistic career choices. Clients below a certain threshold of readiness lack the life experiences and personal inclinations needed to make fitting occupational choices. To increase their readiness, a counselor may help these clients develop the decisional attitudes and learn the choice concepts that sustain realistic career planning. To do this, some counselors use an intervention method in which they discuss client responses to items in career development inventories. In one form of this didactic career counseling, counselors use instructional materials that explain the rationales for the items in the Career Maturity Inventory Attitude Scale. The logic for teaching the test as an intervention is that the items state attitudes which clients should hold. Counselors have adopted these instructional materials for use in group counseling, career development courses, and newsletters. Other innovative ways of teaching the test will appear as more counselors use the item rationales. (Item numbers from the Career Maturity Inventory Attitude and Concepts test which are relevant are listed in the categories of orientation, involvement, independence, compromise, decisiveness, view, criteria, and bases.) (Author/ABL)

Developing Career Choice Readiness

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Abstract

Career maturity denotes degree of readiness to make realistic career choices. Clients below a certain threshold of readiness lack the life experiences and personal inclinations needed to make fitting occupational choices. To increase their readiness, a counselor may help these clients develop the decisional attitudes and learn the choice concepts that sustain realistic career planning. To do this, some counselors use an intervention method in which they discuss client responses to items in career development inventories. In one form of this didactic career counseling, counselors use instructional materials that explain the rationales for the items in the Career Maturity Inventory Attitude Scale. Counselors have adapted these instructional materials for use in group counseling, career development courses, and newsletters.

Developing Career Choice Readiness: A Method and Materials

The originator of the matching model for career counseling suggested that counselors use developmental assessments to guide differential treatment of clients. In describing the goals of an initial career counseling interview, Frank Parsons advised counselors to classify clients into one of two main classes.

> First, those who have well-developed aptitudes and interests and a practical basis for a reasonable conclusion in respect to the choice of a vocation. Second, boys and girls with so little experience that there is no basis yet for a wise decision (Parsons, 1909/1967, p. 19).

Following the seminal work of Super (1955), contemporary counselors assess clients' career maturity to determine if they possess "a practical basis for a reasonable conclusion".

Simply defined, career maturity means readiness for making realistic career choices. Clients below a certain threshold of readiness lack the life experiences and personal inclinations to make realistic choices. These clients need to develop attitudes that move them closer to the choice threshold. Counselors can help clients increase their readiness to make realistic career choices by discussing their attitudes toward vocational decision making and concepts about career choice.

Some counselors use career development inventories to identify the immature attitudes and mistaken ideas that a client should reconsider. Of the many career development inventories that counselors may use in this manner, the Career Maturity Inventory Attitude Scale (CMI; Crites,

1978) seems particularly well suited to the purpose because it surveys the most important attitudes toward vocational decision making and concepts about career choice. Definitions of these decisional attitudes (involvement, orientation, compromise, independence, and decisiveness) and choice concepts (criterion, conception, and choice bases) appear in the Appendix.

In addition to providing a multidimensional assessment of career choice readiness, the CMI may be used as an intervention to develop readiness. Crites (1974) claimed that by discussing the CMI items which clients answered in the immature direction, clients can incorporate new ideas into their thinking and develop a more mature approach to vocational decision making. He recommended that counselors "teach the test" to clients in order to bring them up to the choice threshold. Simply stated, the logic for teaching the test as an intervention is that the items state attitudes which clients should hold.

CMI Materials for Developing Readiness

To assist counselors who do didactic career counseling (Healy, 1982, p. 305) with the CMI Screening Form (A-1), Crites (1973) wrote instructional materials that indicate the more mature response to each item and explain its rationale. Based on his experience with these materials during career counseling, Crites concluded that teaching the test was a highly effective method for increasing clients' readiness to make career decisions and the realism of their educational and vocational choices. Crites and Savickas (1980) revised the Screening

Form (A-2) rationales based on feedback from counselors and their own experience in using the rationales. They also added rationales for the additional items in the Counseling Form (B-1).

Counselors have used the CMI item rationales to teach the test in two main ways. Some counselors teach the test by discussing the CMI items which a client missed in the order that the items appear in the inventory booklet. Other counselors discuss all the items that a client missed within one subscale then move in turn to items from another subscale until they have discussed all five groups of decisional items. This procedure allows counselors to use the subscale items to explain the five attitudinal variables and relate them to the client's decision-making efforts. Although both of these procedures for teaching the test work well, they each have a drawback. The first procedure does not take advantage of the theoretical dimensions that structure the CMI while the second procedure does not use all the information available in the CMI.

To avoid these disadvantages, Savickas (in press) devised a model to do instructional counseling with the CMI rationales. This hierarchical model attends first to planful concern about the future and second to sense of self-control over one's future. After dealing with these two sets of attitudes toward vocational decision making, the model attends to career choice concepts. The following three sections briefly explain the superordinate constructs of career choice concern, control, and concepts as well as how they may be sequenced along a developmental continuum of choice readiness.

Career Choice Concern

The most fundamental construct measured by the CMI is career choice concern. A concerned approach to decision making is sustained by the attitudes Crites called orientation and involvement. Orientation items deal with the client's awareness of the vocational decision-making process. Clients with mature attitudes usually seek to familiarize themselves with how people choose occupations and develop careers. Clients less inclined to orient themselves to how careers develop have vague and inaccurate notions about career choice. When pressed to make a career choice, they feel confused. These clients benefit from consciousness-raising counseling techniques that increase foresight and heighten awareness of career development tasks (Savickas, 1989). When clients have a cognitive schema to sustain career dreams and occupational fantasies, they are ready to involve themselves in the decision-making process.

A client can be familiar with the choice process without getting involved in it. Involvement items address whether clients relate themselves to the process of making a choice and actively participate in it. Clients with mature attitudes tend to think about alternative careers and try to relate their present behavior to future goals. Clients who are less inclined to get involved in the vocational decision-making process just do not worry about the future. Often, they prefer to enjoy the present and take life one day at a time. When pressed to make a career choice, they feel anxious. These clients benefit from counseling techniques that help them make their future "real" by populating it with anticipated events and goals that give it

shape and substance (Savickas, 1990). After people show concern for the future, they start to think about who controls their future.

Career Choice Control

Clients who are concerned about their futures are ready to take control of the vocational decision-making process. A sense of control over vocational decision making is sustained by the attitudes Crites called independence, decisiveness, and compromise. Independence items deal with self-reliance in making career choices. Immature attitudes incline clients to depend on other people to choose for them. Decisiveness items deal with commitment to making career choices. Immature attitudes incline clients to feel uncertain and to avoid committing themselves to making a choice. Compromise items deal with willingness to acknowledge and concede to the demands of reality. Immature attitudes incline clients to distort or deny aspects of reality which may limit or block their need fulfillment. To avoid anxiety or frustration, clients with immature compromise attitudes rigidly maintain their subjectivity rather than increase their objectivity.

Clients who incompletely develop or lack one or more of these attitudes usually display a dependent, uncertain, or rigid approach to career choice that leads to indecision. These clients typically benefit from behavioral counseling techniques that increase their self-esteem and realism or develop their assertiveness and decisional skills. Clients disposed to independence, decisiveness, and compromise approach career choice with a sense of control because these attitudes facilitate self-reliant, confident, and realistic vocational decision making. Thus, they are ready to decide. How they go about deciding depends upon

their ideas or concepts about career choice.

Career Choice Concepts

Concern and control empower the decision-making process and prompt thought about one's career choice beliefs. Individuals who are concerned about the future and feel in control of their fate start to form ideas about how to make career choices. Career choice concepts refer to an individual's private logic about choosing, not to specific occupational choices. Whereas decisional concern and control deal with decisiveness, career choice concepts deal with realism. Realistic concepts about career choice include an understanding of how to make a choice, which criteria should circumscribe choice, and the appropriate bases for choice. Clients' concepts about career choice may be examined by considering their view, criteria, and bases. Six items (5, 18, 21, 32, 41, and 68) in the CMI deal with view of how to make a career choice. The counselor should try to disabuse clients of any misconceptions expressed in their responses to these items. Nine items (6, 11, 23, 26, 29, 47, 50, 64, 74) deal with criteria for defining a good career choice. Counselors can use these items to identify clients who use power, prestige, or possessions as choice criteria and encourage them to consider the role of intrinsic rewards in producing job and life satisfaction.

After discussing a client's choice criteria, the counselor can use four items (2, 8, 17, and 35) to explain the intrinsic criteria on which one should base a career choice: needs, interests, abilities, and values. Counselors should try to convince clients to base their choices on a synthesis of these four factors because using any one factor alone

can produce an incongruent career choice. Discussions of choice bases make a smooth transition to administration or interpretation of interest inventories and ability tests.

In summary, clients are ready to make decisive and realistic career choices when they display concern for and a sense of control over the vocational decision-making process, hold a viable view of how to make a choice, express intrinsic criteria for their choices, and want to base their choices on a synthesis of their needs, interests, abilities, and values.

Counseling Procedures

In using CMI item rationales to prompt discussion of career choice concern, control, and concepts, counselors may use a three-step cycle: (1) non-directive exploration, (2) directive shaping, and (3) active learning. Different types of interviewing responses and goals define each phase in this item teaching cycle.

Non-directive Exploration. Counselors begin the cycle by reading an item that the client answered in the immature direction and asking the client to explain the reason for the chosen response. This sets the topic and begins the exploration of the client's outlook. For example, a counselor might say, "On item 54 you agreed that you would feel better if someone chose for you. What did you have in mind when you answered this question?" To draw out the client's attitude and to probe the beliefs, feelings, and behavioral tendencies associated with it, the counselor may use non-directive responses such as open questions, restatement of relevant content, reflection of feeling, silence, and

clarification of meaning.

Directive Shaping. Having explored the client's outlook, the counselor actively uses responses that elicit and shape a more mature view (Flake, Roach, & Stenning, 1975). The counselor teaches the client the rationale for the item and uses values confrontation (Young, 1979) to create dissonance about immature attitudes toward vocational decision making. During the ensuing discussion the counselor may use responses such as instruction, persuasion, verbal modeling, storytelling, and reinforcement to help clients reduce the felt discrepancy by reconceptualizing their beliefs and developing new attitudes. Counselors use their expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness to block unproductive paths to dissonance reduction (e.g., discredit counselor, use counterpersuasion, devalue the issue, seek social support), and confirm client attitude change with encouragement and support (Strong, 1968).

Active Learning. When the client verbally expresses an improved outlook, the counselor encourages the client to translate it into goal directed vocational behavior. The counselor may use responses such as behavioral modeling, homework assignments, role playing, and feedback to guide instrumental learning. This completes the three phases in the item discussion cycle. Accordingly, the counselor moves to the next item that the client answered in the immature direction and repeats the cycle. In exploring the new item, the counselor listens to hear if the client has integrated and generalized pertinent insights that were learned in discussing a previous item. If the earlier learning has not generalized to the new item, then the counselor proceeds to the

directive shaping and active learning steps.

After considering each item, the counselor usually summarizes what the client has learned and restates what the client will do to confirm and enact the new attitudes. The counselor may also draw from the client the implications which the new decisional attitudes have for choices the client is trying to make in interpersonal, family, or leisure roles. For example, the counselor might say "I hear you now saying that it is important to make your own career choice. I wonder if you think it is okay to rely on people to make other kinds of choices for you?"

Alternative Procedures

A few counselors use the item discussion cycle without administering the CMI to clients. Unlike the test-interpretation method, the test-teaching method does not require that clients take the test. The counselor may just sit down with a client and begin to discuss the items by asking a client to verbally respond to the first item. If the client offers a mature response, the counselor reinforces it and moves to the next item. If the response shows an immature outlook, then the counselor begins the discussion cycle outlined above.

In addition to teaching the test to individual clients, counselors have used the item rationales in process-oriented career counseling groups. These groups do not address which occupational choice (content) is right for each group member, but instead deal with the approach to decision making (process) that is right for everyone in the group. Teaching the test works even more effectively when the counselor enlists

group dynamics in the item discussion cycle. For example, those group members who have already developed a particular attitude receive reinforcement and serve as role models to other group members who are still developing that disposition. The group members can help the counselor confirm or contradict the thinking of a client as well as encourage the client to experiment with new attitudes and behaviors.

Although not widely used, other variants of teaching the test have been effective. Flake, Roach, and Stenning (1975) combined the teach-the-test method with a second instructional counseling method, reinforcement-modeling. In individual sessions, counselors reviewed clients' incorrect response to CMI items without indicating that the client had responded immaturely to the items. During this review, counselors ignored clients' immature statements and reinforced their mature statements. Flake, Roach, and Stenning concluded from their research that this counseling method increased the career maturity of clients. Healy (1982, pp. 317-321) suggested that counselors reduce client errors and lessen anxiety associated with instructional counseling by teaching the concepts assessed by the scale before administering it and discussing incorrect answers. Savickas and Crites (1981) designed a course to teach the Counseling Form item rationales to high school students. A teachers' guide for the course includes detailed lesson plans, teaching tips, overhead transparencies, and student handouts. A field test of the course indicate that, compared to a control group, 10th-grade students who participated in the course improved their foresight and reduced their decisional difficulties (Savickas, 1990). Freeman (1975) wrote and pilot tested ten sociodramas

to teach the CMI variables to students. The sociodramas are semi-structured; an opening dialogue sets the problem and leaves the conclusion of the drama to the student actors. Counselors at a community college used the rationales to compose a "Dear Abby" type feature for their newsletter (Julian, 1980). And most recently, Savickas and Crites (1988) augmented each item rationale with an activity that counselors may assign as homework or use as a microintervention during counseling sessions. Other innovative ways of teaching the test probably will appear as more counselors use the item rationales.

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Appendix

Career Maturity Inventory Attitudes and Concepts

Attitudes Toward Decision Making

Orientation is the extent to which an individual is familiar with and relates self to the decisional process.
Items: 10, 12, 25, 27, 40, 42, 55, 57, 70, 72

Involvement is the extent to which an individual actively participates in the decisional process.
Items: 4, 6, 19, 21, 34, 36, 41, 51, 64, 66

Independence is the extent to which an individual relies upon other people in the decisional process.
Items: 7, 9, 22, 24, 37, 39, 52, 54, 67, 69

Compromise is the extent to which an individual willingly balances subjective needs and objective reality in the decisional process.
Items: 13, 15, 28, 30, 43, 58, 73

Decisiveness is the extent to which an individual feels definite about making a career choice.
Items: 1, 3, 16, 18, 31, 33, 46, 48, 61, 63

Concepts About Career Choice

View is the extent to which an individual possesses accurate ideas about making career choices.
Items: 5, 18, 21, 32, 41, 68

Criteria is the extent to which an individual expresses intrinsic work values in making career choices.
Items: 6, 11, 23, 26, 29, 47, 50, 64, 74

Bases is the extent to which an individual founds career choices upon a synthesis of needs, interests, abilities, and values.
Items: 2, 8, 17, 35